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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE DAILY CABLE

Tuesday 6 June 1978 CG NIDC 78/131C

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National Intelligence Daily Cable for Tuesday, 6 June 1978.

The NID Cable is for the purpose of informing senior US officials.

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SYRIA-LEBANON: Military Planning

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[] Syria may be preparing to move its forces in Lebanon into the Palestinian-dominated zone between the Zahrani and Litani Rivers after Israel completes its withdrawal from southern Lebanon on 13 June. Syrian President Assad is said to have agreed to this during his talks with Lebanese President Sarkis last week. It is uncertain how the Israelis would regard such a move.

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[] Although there is little information on the talks, President Assad publicly hinted at the conclusion of the meeting that he was willing to move Syrian forces south. Syrian media commentary on the talks has also implied such a move was possible.

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[] Assad has long wanted to bring the Palestinians under stricter Syrian supervision, and the Syrians have repeatedly urged the Palestinian leadership to cooperate with the UN forces. Greater control over the Palestinians would also be a major step toward facilitating Syria's objective of restoring order in Lebanon.

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[] Assad is doubtless aware that a major Syrian move south would be opposed by extremist Palestinians and perhaps even by PLO leader Arafat. During recent discussions in Damascus, the Syrians and Palestinians may have tried to work out an arrangement to allow the Syrians to move into Nabatiyah and other strategic points without provoking a confrontation. Arafat might agree if this would help him control Palestinian extremists, but he would be wary of any Syrian attempts to inhibit the activities of his own organization, Fatah.

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[] If the Syrians move troops to the Litani River, they will probably try first to draw from forces already stationed in Lebanon, rather than commit additional units from Syria. They would probably use elements of the infantry brigade in the Sidon-Jazzin area, or possibly the armored brigade in the Bekka Valley or commando forces in northern Lebanon.

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[] If the Syrians do commit additional forces from Syria, they will probably draw from commando units or security forces in Damascus rather than from frontline units facing Israel, which have already been significantly weakened to provide units for the Arab security force in Lebanon.

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[] Israeli officials have said nothing in recent weeks to indicate how they might view the movement of units of Syrian-dominated Arab Deterrent Forces to the Litani. Defense Minister Weizman and former Chief of Staff Gur hinted broadly at the end of March, shortly after the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon, that they would be willing to discuss the possibility--provided the Syrians indicated their intention to control local Palestinian units.

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[] Foreign Minister Dayan indicated several weeks later, however, that he did not favor a Syrian movement to the south. He doubted that the Syrians would prove willing or able to control the Palestinians.

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[] A leading Israeli political commentator recommended yesterday that the government rethink the whole issue, taking into consideration the presence of UN troops now in the south.

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CHINA-VIETNAM: Refugee Evacuation

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[REDACTED] Vietnam has agreed to permit Chinese ships to evacuate ethnic Chinese from Vietnamese ports. Both sides continue, however, to make charges and countercharges about the refugee issue.

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[REDACTED] A Vietnamese Foreign Ministry note handed to the Chinese Ambassador in Hanoi yesterday stipulated, however, that Chinese ships would have to comply with normal procedures "governing foreign ships entering Vietnamese ports" and said that the first Chinese ship would not be allowed to dock until 20 June.

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[REDACTED] Vietnamese domestic radiobroadcasts carried the news of Vietnam's agreement to the Chinese proposal. Within hours of Hanoi's public announcement, the official Chinese news agency reported that two passenger ships now anchored near Canton would "leave shortly" for Vietnam.

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[REDACTED] Vietnam had earlier called for negotiations to discuss China's announcement that it would send ships. China has not yet responded to the call for talks, however, and there are no indications of high-level exchanges.

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[REDACTED] Peking now says more than 100,000 refugees have entered China. The Chinese media have been placing increased blame on the Soviets for encouraging the Vietnamese crackdown on the Chinese community. [REDACTED]

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BRIEFS

Colombia

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[REDACTED] Colombia's presidential election Sunday between ruling Liberal Party candidate Julio Cesar Turbay and Conservative Party challenger Belisario Betancur is proving to be as controversial as it is close. Initial returns on a reported 95 percent of the balloting show Turbay ahead by approximately 88,000 votes. There are still some 200,000 more votes to be counted, however, and Turbay's razor-thin lead could be substantially narrowed or even erased.

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[] The lead has seesawed back and forth throughout the tallying and both parties have claimed victory. Whoever wins, the narrowness of the victory will almost certainly make a recount inevitable. Because of the political and social turmoil that preceded the election, any significant delay in announcing an official winner will heighten tensions and could spark another round of violent demonstrations by student and leftist groups as well as by dissatisfied party supporters. []

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China-Zaire

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[] Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua underlined his country's support for Zairian President Mobutu on Sunday by visiting him in Shaba Region.

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[] Huang reiterated the Chinese accusation that the USSR and Cuba are behind the troubles in Shaba and almost certainly discussed increasing China's economic and military aid programs in Zaire. Any increase is likely to be modest, however, and Huang probably encouraged the Zairian leader to continue seeking assistance from the West as well as from moderate and conservative African governments.

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[] China already has approvingly noted the French-Belgian military operation in Shaba, and Huang may also have encouraged the dispatch of an inter-African military force to replace the departing French. The Chinese, however, are unlikely to reverse their longstanding policy against sending combat forces of their own to regions far from China.

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[] Huang leaves Zaire today for the Netherlands and will also visit Turkey on his way home. []

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Egypt

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[] Egypt's small leftist Progressive Unionist Party announced yesterday the suspension of all its activities in protest against a new law initiated by President Sadat that curtails political freedoms. The party will also cease publication of its popular weekly newspaper, *Al Ahali*, and will consider next week whether to dissolve itself altogether. Last Friday, Egypt's largest opposition party, the conservative New Wafd, dissolved itself in a similar protest.

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[] The leftist party--a loose coalition of Marxists, socialists, and followers of the late President Nasir--holds only three seats in Egypt's parliament, but it has a constituency far broader than its small representation in the legislature suggests. The new law was directed primarily at the Egyptian left and at prominent leftist intellectuals and journalists--most notably Mohammed Haykal--who are not affiliated with the party but have used its newspaper to criticize the government.

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[] The law, which Sadat signed over the weekend, contradicts the Egyptian constitution and there are already plans to challenge it in the courts. []

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